THE MEDIEVAL SOLOMON AND CONSTRUCTION OF INTERPRETATION IN *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

Mickey Sweeney

Þe best burne ay abof, as hit best semed
Whene Guenore, ful gay, grayþed in þe myddes,
Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute,
Smal sendał besides, a selure hir ouer
Of tried Tolouse, of Tars tapites innoghe,
Þat were embrawded and beten wyth þe best gemes
Þat myȝt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye,
In daye.
Þe comlokest to discrye
Þer glent with yȝen gray,
A semloker þat euer he syȝe
Soth moȝt no mon say. (73-84)[1]

Why is it important that Guinevere be the most beautiful woman in the world, surrounded by the most sumptuous of everything?

Is it so that we understand that beautiful women are dangerous? That even in her seemingly idle non-participation in this tale we know that she is important? Should we instantly read Solomon's knot as a sign to beware of beautiful women (particularly if they come at you in groups of three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines) and understand that there is more to the women in this romance than initially seems to be the case?

It is clear that for the *Gawain*-poet what we *see* is intimately connected to how we should think about certain things—an argument supported by his seeming compulsive impulse to lushly describe so many of the details in his poem. An unsophisticated Marxist reading of this passage might lead us towards an analysis of conspicuous consumption, but that these characters must be the most worthy because they are the most wealthy seems not a sophisticated enough reading of the *Gawain*-poet's intentions.

If we direct our thoughts towards a Saussurian reading, we might argue that this wealth of words, these delicious details that describe the state and status of these characters, *is necessary* so that we might take meaning away from these images. But as every structuralist must ask—how do we make meaning from these detailed images?

Françoise Pinponnier, as cited in *The New Middle Ages*, argues that for many costume historians "the middle of the fourteenth century marks the beginning of fashion as a phenomenon; the new way of dressing represented fashion that imposed its taste and its rhythms on a restricted social class" (65). Thus the *Gawain*-poet is clearly not the only author fixated on details of dress, nor is he the only one to attribute specialized meaning to its nuances. It is perhaps later than is useful for this project, but too interesting to ignore, when Desiree Koslin suggests that it is

> [a]round 1410, [that] John of Berry commissioned the sumptuous prayer book . . . the *Très Riches Heures*. At this time Paris was the scene of bloody encounters between the Armagnacs [and the Burgundians] . . . . Put to the test by war and the political and economic chaos that accompanied it, the aristocratic society evolved within the confines of the closed world of the court, and made itself visible, idealized, in the illuminated manuscripts. It is here that a new fashion model was elaborated, that of the courtier, no longer to be understood solely by feats of arms, but in representations of self, manifested by his mastery of the social codes and his belonging to the 'courtly elite.' (161)

Could the *Gawain*-poet being drawing on such trends that were already available in the fourteenth century? For examples of how the gentry were engaging in "myth making" and Arthurian-styled chivalric self-fashioning, Danna Piroyansky provides useful details:

> In the late middle ages members of the gentry were creating new ways to present themselves and their newly acquired responsibilities. A miniature in the Luttrell Psalter, showing Sir Geoffrey Luttrell on horseback with his coat of arms displayed several times highlights the point; it has been interpreted as an 'extraordinary lavish

> expression of identity which conveys at the same time, Luttrell's social standing, lineage....' The Luttrell Psalter was made for the Luttrell family of Irnham village, [a small village in] Lincolnshire, from 1325-40. (38)[2]

In trying to understand the cultural significance of texts such as the Luttrell Psalter, we must consider "why its designs are reflective of a community that wanted to locate its identity in codes of chivalry and Christianity that would create for it a 'community of ideals'" (38). I would argue that this might well be one of the audiences that the *Gawain*-poet was trying to engage, as his own text reflects such a hybrid of themes and interests. It might also be useful to think of the correlations between this construction of fourteenth-century gentry identity and the construction of the Gawain character by the poet; if both are drawing on external sources to sustain/create a particular image, then the poet might well seek to present to his audience with a conversation that problematizes identity.

For example, when the *Gawain*-poet builds the foundation of his romance on the idea of Solomon, is the audience's knowledge of his importance limited to the scope of what is mentioned in the romance? And, are we meant to understand that carrying Solomon's knot on his shield symbolizes something about Gawain, as well as knighthood in the larger sense? The poet actually breaks into the poem to establish that Gawain's shield bears a symbol that is indeed called Solomon's knot. We might be expected to take it as truth, therefore, when the *Gawain*-poet in describing Solomon's knot says "*and Englych hit callen Overal, as I here, the endeles knot*" [the English call it all over, as I hear, the endless knot] (629-30). Instead, as James Winny notes, there is no other use of "endeles knot" known (144). Winny's answer to this conundrum is that the intricate form and symbolism of the pentangle evidently has a "fascination" for the poet. He states:

> ...since the pentangle plays no part in Gawain's adventure and since the symbolism claimed for it is at best dubious, it is difficult to understand why the poet introduced this admitted digression. But as suggested above, he has a great liking for elaborate contrivances..., [for example,] *the endeles knot.* (144)

We might answer Winny's question with the thought that, if the poet makes special mention of something, he is indeed working hard to create some connections in the mind of the audience with what is known about Solomon and the symbol itself. If *Solomon's knot* is a term unfamiliar to the audience, then they might just take the *Gawain*-poet's definition of it to heart. An important question would then become: does the listener who knows the story of Solomon automatically understand the association that the poet is clearly trying to make—that Gawain and Solomon share a certain status because women have tricked them both? Or, to interpret Gawain's situation, does the listener also look at, *or to*, church windows, Psalters, public art, manuscripts, other stories, or the Bible, and rely on "official" Church interpretation to try to understand the poet's use of "Solomon's knot"?

Is the poet deliberately trying to force the audience to ask questions about what it thinks it knows? One step further might be to ask if the poet is deliberately trying to force the audience to ask questions about how it interprets even the words and events it thinks it understands.

This would make sense of the questioning patterns that the poet introduces into the text. We question what it indicates about Gawain that he carries a shield with Solomon's knot on it. The poet gives us extensive detail about everything but the connection to Solomon. We question Gawain's interpretation of his own actions, his sins; we see that Gawain says he is flawed and sinful but it is the Green Knight who provides Gawain with the first "external" reading of his actions. He claims that Gawain took the girdle because he "lufed" his own life (2368) and therefore is "*On þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote ȝede*" [of a man most faultless by far / Of all that ever walked over the wide earth] (2363; Borroff 70).[3] Would the medieval audience's understanding of this moment in the story reflect Gawain's reading or is room deliberately made for diverging interpretations? Could external sources for understanding these texts provide insight into what might be Gawain's problematic reading of his own situation? In an age of Wyclifite anxiety over interpretation, it is clear that such questions need to be asked.

Romance Sources

If external sources for the text play a role, then it is important, if difficult, to know where to start when it comes to building a narrative backdrop to what the author intended by creating this version of the Gawain character. Elisabeth Brewer in *From Cuchulainn to Gawain; Sources and Analogues of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provides sources of the hero's potential romance history. To a particularly noble audience, one familiar with such works as Chrétien's *Arthurian Romances,* the Gawain of a more worldly reputation would have been recognizable. In Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* for example, we see him as a willing and able companion to Lancelot on his quest for Guinevere, but as distracted as he is by the ladies that he meets on his journey, he never experiences love. Gawain's more pedestrian encounters establish him as the perfect foil to Lancelot's passion. To the more general fourteenth-century public however, Geoffrey of Monmoth's *Historia* provides the audience with a grim, awkward, womanizing, but loyal to Arthur, portrayal of a more mature Gawain.[4]

Even this too brief history perhaps puts in context the Temptress's version of who Gawain is; she accuses him of *not* acting as the famous *luf*-talking Gawain should. It is suggested at four points in the text that Gawain could not possibly be "The Gawain" of "*luf*-talking" and martial renown, given his very imperfect responses to both romantic and martial situations: imperfect, that is, according to the Lady and the Green Knight (1236-44, 1291-1301, 1480-85, 2270-74). The divergence between the Gawain present in the text, the one who fears for his life and chastity and who carries Solomon's knot on his shield, and the myth of the *luf*-talker that travels in the exulted, and perhaps overly proud circles of Arthur's court, begins to become clear to the audience because of the attention that the *Gawain*-poet focuses on the character's actions and the motivations for his actions.

Gawain struggles as the man who is accused throughout the Hautdesert/Green Chapel experience of not living up to the reputation of the "real" and famously courteous Gawain, which suggests that the Poet's audience would have thoroughly understood the precariousness of the relationship between symbol and signifier, and would have been expecting Gawain to prove himself and end the romance in triumph. In the context of the romance genre, it is singular that Gawain would not be asked to fight on his quest, at least not through the method of arms; thus his martial skills become secondary to his *courteyse* and his

faith. Not only is Gawain Arthur's knight and the knight of Solomon's knot, but also the knight of the new gentry, the one that does not define itself solely in terms of prowess and "worship," and relies, much like the Luttrell example, heavily on coats of arms and other symbols of status, to define a place in the world.

In a wider search for potential insight into the poet's adoption of Solomon's knot and the creation of the character in these terms, one might think that other manuscript renderings of romance heroes would be an appropriate place to start. But it seems, according to R. S. Loomis's exhaustive, if older work, that there are very few English representations. In French, Italian, Dutch, and German manuscripts there are far more to be found, as well as in church windows and miniatures. Of the five illustrations he notes from the fourteenth century, three are the "infantile daubes" associated with the *Gawain* manuscript itself (Loomis 138). Much work has been done since Loomis, and we have moved beyond his harsh criticism of the drawings later added to the Cotton Nero a.x manuscript, but new evidence still remains tentative as to what specific examples the artist might have been drawing from for his depictions, and when he might have added them to the manuscript.[5]

The lack of many visual romance models that could serve as comparisons for Gawain's actions might provide one explanation for why the poet incorporated famous Christian characters into his poem. Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, and Solomon are Gawain's sources of narrative context for understanding his own downfall. Gawain places himself in the loftiest of "flawed" company when he envisions himself in the ranks of David, Adam, Samson, and Solomon. Any medieval audience would have readily (perhaps much more readily that our modern one) known and understood something about these men, but we must ask, why link them to Gawain? What does it achieve in the romance? Or is the poet simply reflecting a tradition of mixed genres, chivalric and Christian, which was already present in the fourteenth century?

Art and Image Sources

Loomis describes how strange it is that we would find images from romances in churches, and claims that perhaps the craftsmen were "enjoying" themselves. He recommends that we should be glad that the churchmen were not as strict in life as they were in paper; furthermore,

he argues that perhaps in an effort to reach the public, artisans incorporated biblical and romance heroes as the cautionary figures appropriate to a design created to underscore moral behaviors (138). In York Minster, for example, we have the figures of Samson and Delilah as predominant sculptures in a series depicting court life as well as romance renderings. Over the north door is the hunt: "a woman is setting a dog on two beasts, and behind them is a man blowing a horn. At the sides are two quatrefoils . . . (1) of a man attacking another man drinking, and (2) one man driving another away." The sculpture over the south door after restoration consists of "a man in the middle fighting a dragon, with sword and shield, and at the sides in the quatrefoils (1) Delilah cutting the hair of Samson, and Samson and the lion; (2) a man and woman fighting" (Clutton-Brock 79). Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Samson and Delilah make cameo appearances in the *Gawain* text and contribute to just such a "cautionary" tradition. Of course, we must ask what is being cautioned; is it only to beware of the wiles of wicked women?

Clearly, images in the forms of wall paintings, statues, and stained glass windows provide us with sources for the medieval audience's conception of biblical scenes and the lives of the saints, some local, such as Saint Winifrid of Wales, Saint Wilifrid (see Mobberely, Cheshire et.al.,), and others more universally famous, such as Saint George.[6] This would certainly help to explain why the *Gawain*-poet could with such confidence and so little explanation employ the name of Solomon. He would be familiar to this audience, even if Solomon's knot was not, as Solomon was among the panoply of figures whose stories were popular, not only in sermons, but as images in the churches themselves. Although the Bible itself was not available in an approved English translation, and many people could not read, there were "five Solomons in glass and at least one, possibly two in stone (depending on whether a sculptural figure from the western towers, c. 1150, is Solomon or not)," in York Minster alone.[7] It stands to reason that the medieval audience would have been familiar enough with the story of Solomon to understand why the poet would want to associate Gawain with the biblical king.

Winny again tells us in the notes to his translation that

> [t]he shield has a Christian icon on one side (649) and a pagan emblem on the other. In this respect it is typical of its age. Many medieval English churches are decorated

> with Pagan symbols—unknowingly, one supposes.... (line notes 619, 624, 630)

Disagree as we might with Winny's estimation of the degree of complexity in the process of decorating medieval churches, it seems a logical step to try to come to some understanding of the medieval idea of Solomon, both in Christian and non-Christian terms. It would be good to get a sense of what was broadly understood about the character of Solomon in regards to literary sources as well as artistic ones.

Literary Sources

Michael Hattaway cites several medieval authors who envisioned Solomon in contradictory ways. For example, Dante saw him as the paragon of wisdom, and then there were others, such as Langland, who depicted him as a figure who was not assured of salvation (504).[8] In the *Confessio*, Gower uses Solomon as both a positive and negative exemplar, depending on the sin he was examining.[9] The history of Solomon as magician that both Hattaway and Lynn Thorndike discuss in their respective research, is pertinent in relation to this text, owing to the fact that Gawain is wearing Solomon's knot while facing a magical test of faith and chastity.[10]

Pamela Williams argues in "Dante's Heaven of the Sun and the Wisdom of Solomon" that

> [t]he wisdom of Solomon is proverbial; it is exalted among others by St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, Dante's two spokespersons in the two circles of the wise in the Heaven of the Sun. Indicating the brightest light Thomas says that there never was one so wise nor will there ever be (*Paradiso* X 109-14). . . . Thomas explains . . . that the kind of wisdom God granted Solomon was specifically kingly wisdom, „regal prudenza" (104) so as to clear up any misunderstandings there might be about his being second to none in relation to Adam and Christ. (165)

Marguerite Chiarenza finds Dante "imitating as well as vindicating the author of the Song of Songs in the Heaven of the Sun, thus celebrating the art of religious poetry. . . ." She accepts "the interpretation that

Thomas's reference to doubts on earth as to whether Solomon is saved or not is attributable to people thinking that because of the prima facie sensuality of the Song of Songs Solomon had been damned for lust—not to mention, of course, the seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines we hear about in the first book of Kings" (119).[11]

If the wisdom of Solomon was commonly enough known to be understood as proverbial, and directed towards kings, then we can begin to establish a connection between the poet's use of the imagery and a more general knowledge of Solomon. In understanding that this newly painted shield was created for Gawain to answer the Green Knight's challenge and save face for Arthur, we then also know that kingly wisdom is something Arthur needs. The entire structure of Morgan's test is built upon the weaknesses of Arthur and his court, exemplified in his somewhat petulant demand for wonders or no dinner, and the fear of his other "proud" knights at the sight of the Green Knight. Morgan's desire to frighten Guinevere to death, as well as curb the court's pride, takes on fascinating dimensions in this context. If Guinevere is killed, then perhaps the fate of Camelot could be altered. It need not become the next Troy—a city betrayed by a beautiful woman, selfish love, and blindness to sin (as Gawain would have described it). The fraught nature of the union of Solomon's parents and his coronation hint at other parallels to Arthur's own parentage, as does the undermining of Solomon's leadership through the influence of women. The stories are of course very different, but the dangerous nature of women and their negative impact on good men is a theme that rings through both stories.

To support this reading, we might also look once more outside the poem by suggesting that Solomon's loss of connection to God, as it is described in *I Kings* 11, would have been familiar to author and audience: "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." Wanting to please the many women in his life, Solomon, much like Gawain, places his faith in jeopardy by allowing false idols to tempt him. Gawain's trust is misplaced in the powers of the green girdle offered to him by the temptress, but he only discovers this after the Green Knight has revealed the plot against him. Gawain blames the wiles of women for his downfall, but the problem is, of course, that fear for his life made him susceptible to the tricks of Morgan, or the goddess, as the poet describes her.

This may lead to another link to Solomon's shield that John Drury establishes in his work *Painting the Word.* In his discussion of the Wilton Diptych he suggests:

> On earth, value is art and ornament. In heaven it is the place itself . . . [.] Again contrast carries subsidiary similarities between heaven and earth which allow exchange over the central barrier—as the 'Perle' poet conversed with his daughter over the river. He [the *Gawain*-poet] knew Dante's *Paradise* and it was a strong influence on him. Dante too had written out of grief of bereavement. . . . Like Perle, she dominated the mourner, instructed and rebuked him. . . . The late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century world was dominated by men, so, appropriately enough we only see them on the left. Women were kept on the edge of the world, in a negative and depressing sense of that phrase. Religiously, however, the edge of the world was awesome. It was the threshold of the other world with all its power and glory, reached at death and touched by the sacraments and prayer. Marginalized in the ordinary way of things, women were also—and even perhaps, therefore—idealized in conditions of extremity. One of these was the passion of love. (Drury 16-17)

Drury's research helps us begin to make more sense of why a religious format begins to take over romance genre expectations in this poem. We have a knight, after all, who venerates Mary but is at the mercy of Morgan. It is fear for his life that betrays him, but once he realizes that he was tricked, he then associates himself with a selection of biblical heroes who were brought low by women. He is the next in a long line of Davids, Samsons, Adams, and Solomons. Such a reading sheds light on the poet's construction of the women in the poem: they are all powerful, but only in two ways, and that is in the ways that are reflected Drury's description. Mary is idealized in terms of virginity and perfection, while the Temptress (powerful in her sexuality), Morgan (powerful as the mistress of Merlin), and Guinevere (equally powerful in her sexuality) are creatures of the other extreme. It is provocative that the women who seem so powerless in Gawain's world are so powerful behind the scenes of the text.

What provides an even more provocative context for understanding the *Gawain*-poet's use of Solomon is Patricia Eberle's reading of the Carmelite friar Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*, which Richard II requested be written as a Latin poem to commemorate and record the reconciliation of his feud with London, the New Troy (231). Eberle argues that the negative emphasis upon the fashion and the lavishness of Richard's court that can be found in works like "'Richard the Redeless' did not simply criticize the worldliness of the court but was intended to comment on the court as failing to offer any resistance to royal power" (251).

David Aers further discusses Maidstone's work, saying that he "records for Richard (and for posterity) a picture of Richard as frozen in perpetual youth as, at once, Paris, Troilus, Absalom, and Solomon and of New Troy as the site of bounty" (250). He argues that "in putting together such a disastrous set of figures, Maidstone most likely intended to instruct as well as praise his prince, implicitly urging him to maintain control by maintaining his 'masculine' wisdom. The language of marriage that Maidstone employs functions as a trope for royal power: the bridegroom longs to enter the bridal chamber where he will restore 'your' liberties. What is tacitly acknowledged and barely masked by the Solomonic language is the recognition that all marriages have a price" (Aers 230-31).

Aers adds to this reading by suggesting that Chaucer offers the *Clerk's Tale* as rebuttal for anyone who argued for "a strongly king-centered state as a prerequisite for the reformation" (259). Furthermore, to "Wyclif and all others who looked for new worlds, Chaucer offers this one, which is described in the idealized language of Solomon's marriage song but, in fact, is held together by the coin of the realm, undervalued, bendable, and mostly brass" (259). It is clear that in the fourteenth century there are also political and cultural associations between our poem and the more overtly political propagandistic uses of Solomon, wisdom, and the idea of learning from the past, which leads us to think about why Troy might have been introduced as bookends to this poem.

Could this poem be all about endings, even though it proclaims to be about beginnings? I would suggest that the author's inclusion of Troy was designed to be as evocative an act as building the poem on an audience's knowledge of Solomon. Troy was known for great fallen heroes, betrayal, beautiful women, and trickery—what better foil for this story? Solomon provides a mirror for Gawain in that he was known

for his wisdom and, as the *Gawain*-poet phrased it, being beguiled by women (2417); the presence of Troy adds another layer of significance to betrayal and the role of women in the text. Gawain's shield becomes not only a symbol of protection but also a sign of his many identities in the poem. He is Arthur's man, he is a wealthy courtier, he is a knight, and he is perfect in his five senses; he is a deep believer in Mary, and he also seen as troubled by associations with magic; he is wise as Solomon at his best and as flawed as Solomon at his worst, and finally, he serves as a representative of the new Troy. Those are only the representations that can be garnered from the poem. But are we reading too much into these symbols? For example, could the *Gawain*-poet have relied on the fact that many in his audience would see Solomon's weakness for women and allowing false icons into the temple as a warning to Gawain when he adopts "Solomon's knot" and then the green girdle for his protection? I think we must say that indeed he does, as it is the poet who reminds us of Solomon's reputation and downfall when Gawain is spewing forth his invective against women:

> And purȝ wyles of wymmen þe wonen to sorȝe,
> For so watȝ Adam in erde wyth one bygyled,
> And Salamon wyth fele sere, and Samson eftsoneȝ.
> (l.2415-17)

> (And through the wiles of women be wooed into sorrow,
> / For so was Adam by one when the world began, / And
> Solomon by many more, and Samson the mighty)

This disconnect is between interpretations, or rather the discord between audience and "author." By this I mean that it is the Green Knight, and later Arthur's court, who become the audience to Gawain's interpretation of events. It is revealing that they both actively disagree with his reading of things. The Green Knight and Arthur's court understand Gawain's flawed success as success, because they are not uncomfortable with Gawain's being made a fool of, or humbled by, the Temptress and Morgan. A "goddess" magically tested him and his having survived it with his chastity intact is an honorable outcome. The idea of magic operating within the confines of this genre makes perfect sense, as does a powerful female "goddess" pulling the strings with the goal of humbling the over-proud and frightening Guinevere to death. This is a romance reading of Gawain's experiences.

But Gawain has become more than a romance hero; he is also the knight of Mary and the bearer of Solomon's symbol, both of which lead the reader to read the events with Christian glasses on. Indeed, an audience would be led down this path by Gawain himself, as he leaps to a "Christianized" interpretation of events, when he is told that he has been at the mercy of women. The misogynistic outburst, as it is often called, is Gawain's first break with chivalric codes and leads straight into his associating himself with famous Christian men who have been interpreted as being betrayed by women. Even in themselves romances have rarely been considered to be progressive by feminist standards, but no evaluation of betrayal could be more powerful than one that interweaves the romance and Christian traditions. Guinevere's betrayal leads to the destruction of Camelot, Helen's betrayal to the loss of Troy, Solomon's betrayal to the historical loss of the temple, but Eve's betrayal leads to consequences that resonate outside the genre of fiction and history to affect the everyman.

All the romantic, historical, and biblical men and cities in this poem share a common fate: they were brought low by women and could have been saved by Christian values. Some stories never seem to change. But more seriously, in going beyond Solomon's knot and adding the green girdle to the panoply of symbols which define him and influence our understanding of his character, Gawain has become both the hero of romance, which the Green Knight and Arthur's court insist that he remain, and Mary's knight, which he always claimed to be, but only truly became when tested as other Christian heroes have been tested. It is a provocative clash in traditions that success in romance means survival, and success in the Christian tradition can mean failure. We suspect that Gawain's solemn mood at the end of his public confession has much to do with his suffering and, perhaps, even feelings of martyrdom. Gawain's shield for the first time genuinely reflects his true nature, as Gawain and the medieval audience might both agree that the symbols on his shield signify not his potential, or advertising for "what is the best knight, " or even signposts to various issues of cultural significance, but what he has become by the end of the tale.

Dominican University

Notes

[1] Marie Borroff's translation is still considered to be one of the finest verse translations available and is often used in the classroom. For facing page translations, the more recent *Sir Gawain of the Green Knight* by William Vantuono (New York: Garland, 1991) is very useful. I have included passages from both so that readers may get a sample of each; when the translation is not cited, it is from Vantuono.

[2] See the online gallery at the British Library for superb images of the Luttrell Psalter.

[3] For a further discussion of this theme see Gerald Morgan, *Idea of Righteousness*, pp.124-44.

[4] Thanks to Helen Cooper for pointing out that the majority of audiences would not have been familiar with the Gawain hero as depicted by French sources until as late as Malory's works.

[5] Not much is known about the *Gawain*-poet, except that linguistically he can be located as from the northwest Midlands, (southeast Cheshire or northeast Staffordshire). This does not confirm that the manuscript was designed in that locale, although there are some compelling arguments for the York region. See Joel Fredell's work for further discussion. Kathleen L. Scott in her excellent survey of later Gothic Manuscripts (1390-1490) argues that the poem was composed after 1360, copied c.1375-1400, and illustrated c.1400-1410.

[6] It is clear that chastity and beheading were themes from a common motif, as, in an example older than *SGGK*, the story of St. Winifred's Well which was an important place for pilgrims to visit during the Middle Ages. See the Spartacus on-line learning site for a succinct history: "The story is told of how in the seventh century a young prince, Caradoc, visited Tegeingle near the mouth of the River Dee. Caradoc saw a pretty young girl called Winifred and made advances towards her. Winifred rejected him. Caradoc, furious for being treated in this way, chased after her and cut off her head with a sword. The head rolled down the hill towards the church. Winifred's father, Beuno, was just leaving the church and, realizing what had

happened, "cursed Caradoc so that he fell dead." Beuno lifted the head, wrapped it in his cloak and returned to Mass, where he asked the people to help him with their prayers for Winifred. He then joined the "head to her body and she at once revived, and afterwards bearing only a red threadlike mark around her throat." (http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/NORholywell.htm); for more information on Saint Wilfrid see http://freespace.virgin.net/saint.wilfrid/wilfrid.htm.

[7] Many thanks for this information to Louise Hampson, Project Director, *York Minster Revealed.*

[8] Langland suggests that Solomon burns in hell (B.10.384-91) but in passage 12.270-75 "Ymaginatyf straightens Will out and hopes that Solomon is saved." Thanks to Professor Clemente Davlin for the *Piers Plowman* information and citations.

[9] Thanks to Dr. Smantha Rayner for providing the examples from Gower's works.

[10] See also in the Hattaway text: "In the West the legend centered on a number of magical books which had become associated with his name, in particular the Clavis (Clavicula) Salomonis, a collection of talismanic formulae that had for centuries been a popular magical handbook for summoning demons, and, perhaps more serious, the *Ars Notoria.*" See also a segment of Chap. XIV, "Solomon and the Ars Notoria" in Lynn Thorndike's *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (London, 1923) II, 279-89. http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/mes49.htm. See also Ann W. Astell's *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Cornell UP: 1990) for a discussion of how Solomon's writing were interpreted from the twelfth century.

[11] I Kings 11:1-4 "But King Solomon loved many strange women ... he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father." Chiarenza, "Solomon's Song," 119.

Works Cited

Aers, David, and Lynn Staley. *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996.

Astell, Ann W. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages.* Ithica: Cornell UP, 1990.

Borroff, Marie. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: a Stylistic and Metrical Study.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1962.

Brewer, Elisabeth. *From Cuchulainn to Gawain: Sources and Analogues of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield [1974,] c. 1973.

Chiarenza, M. "Solomon's Song in the Divine Comedy." *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and its Afterlife: Essays in Honor of John Freccero.* Ed. D.E. Stewart. Belgium: Brepols, 2000. 119-38.

Clutton-Brock, Arthur. *The Cathedral Church of York: A Description of its Fabric and a Brief History of the Archi-episcopal See.* London: G. Bell, 1899; 1902.

Drury, John. *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meaning.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.

Eberle, Patricia J. "Richard II and the Literary Arts." *Richard II: The Art of Kingship.* Eds. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. 231-53.

Hattaway, Michael. "Paradoxes of Solomon: Learning in the Renaissance." *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 29:4 (Oct–Dec., 1968): 504-26.

Koslin, Desiree, and Janet Snyder, eds. *The New Middle Ages.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Loomis, R.S., with Laura Hibbard Loomis. *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art, Part II.* Modern Language Association of America Monographs. London, Oxford UP; New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1938.

Morgan, Gerald. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Idea of Righteousness.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1991.

Nichols, Ann Eljenholm, and Kathleen L. Scott, eds. *An Index of Images in English Manuscripts: from the time of Chaucer to Henry VIII c. 1380-c. 1509.* London: Harvey Miller, 2008.

Piroyansky, Danna. *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England.* London: Palgrave, 2008.

SaintWilfrid: http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/NORholywell.htm; http://freespace.virgin.net/saint.wilfrid/wilfrid.htm.

Thorndike, Lynn. "Solomon and the Ars Notoria." *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (London, 1923) II: XIV, 279-89. http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/mes49.htm.

Vantuono, William, ed. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Dual-Language Version.* New York: Garland, 1991.

Williams, Pamela. "Dante's Heaven of the Sun and the Wisdom of Solomon." *Italica* 82 (Summer 2005): 165-79.

Winny, James, ed. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006.